

John 6:16-23

From Catena Aurea:

6:15–21

15. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

16. And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea,

17. And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.

18. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.

19. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid.

20. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid.

21. Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Ev. ii. c. xlvi) This is not at all inconsistent with what we read, that He went up into a mountain apart to pray: (Mat. 14:23) the object of escape being quite compatible with that of prayer. Indeed our Lord teaches us here, that whenever escape is necessary, there is great necessity for prayer.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xxv. 2) Yet He who feared to be made a king, was a king; not made king by men, (for He ever reigneth with the Father, in that He is the Son of God,) but making men kings: which kingdom of His the Prophets had foretold. Christ by being made man, made the believers in Him Christians, i. e. members of His kingdom, incorporated and purchased by His Word. And this kingdom will be made manifest, after the judgment; when the brightness of His saints shall be revealed. The disciples however, and the multitude who believed on Him, thought that He had come to reign now; and so would have taken Him by force, to make Him a king, wishing to anticipate His time, which He kept secret.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xlii. 3) See what the belly can do. They care no more for the violation of the Sabbath; all their zeal for God is fled, now that their bellies are filled: Christ has become a Prophet, and they wish to enthrone Him as king. But Christ makes His escape; to teach us to despise the dignities of the world. He dismisses His disciples, and goes up into the mountain. — (Hom. xliii. 1). These, when their Master had left them, went down in the evening to the sea; as we read; And when even was now come, His disciples went down unto the sea. They waited till evening, thinking He would come to them; and then, as He did not come, delayed no longer searching for Him, but in the ardour of love, entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. They went to Capernaum thinking they should find Him there.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xxv. s. 5) The Evangelist now returns to explain why they went, and relate what happened to them while they were crossing the lake: And it was dark, he says, and Jesus was not come to them.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xlii. 1) The mention of the time is not accidental, but meant to shew the strength of their love. They did not make excuses, and say, It is evening now, and night is coming on, but in the warmth of their love went into the ship. And now many things alarm them: the time, And it was now dark; and the weather, as we read next, And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew; their distance from land, So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xliii. 1) And at last He appears quite unexpectedly: They see Jesus walking upon the sea, drawing nigh. He reappears after His retirement, teaching them what it is to be forsaken, and stirring them to greater love; His reappearance manifesting His power. They were disturbed, were afraid, it is said. Our Lord comforts them: But He saith unto them, It is I, be not afraid.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xliii. s. 1) He appeared to them in this way, to shew His power; for He immediately calmed the tempest: Then they wished to receive Him into the ship; and immediately the ship was at the land, whither they went. So great was the calm, He did not even enter the ship, in order to work a greater miracle, and to shew his Divinity more clearly.

THEOPHYLACT. Observe the three miracles here; the first, His walking on the sea; the second, His stilling the waves; the third, His putting them immediately on shore, which they were some distance off, when our Lord appeared.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xliii. 1) Jesus does not shew Himself to the crowd walking on the sea, such a miracle being too much for them to hear. Nor even to the disciples did He shew Himself long, but disappeared immediately.

AUGUSTINE. Mark's¹ account does not contradict this. He says indeed that our Lord told the disciples first to enter the ship, and go before Him over the sea, while He dismissed the crowds, and that when the crowd was dismissed, He went up alone into the mountain to pray: while John places His going up alone in the mountain first, and then says, And when even was now come, His disciples went down unto the sea. But it is easy to see that John relates that as done afterwards by the disciples, which our Lord had ordered before His departure to the mountain.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xliii. 1) Or take another explanation. This miracle seems to me to be a different one, from the one given in Matthew: for there they do not receive Him into the ship immediately, whereas here they do: and there the storm lasts for some time, whereas here as soon as He speaks, there is a calm. He often repeats the same miracle in order to impress it on men's minds.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xxv. s. 3. et seq.) There is a mystical meaning in our Lord's feeding the multitude, and ascending the mountain: for thus was it prophesied of Him, So shall the congregation of the people come about Thee: for their sake therefore lift up Thyself again: (Ps. 7) i. e. that the congregation of the people may come about Thee, lift up Thyself again. But why is it fled; for they could not have detained Him against His will? This fleeing has a meaning; viz. that His flight is above our comprehension; just as, when you do not understand a thing, you say, It escapes me. He fled alone unto the mountain, because He is ascended from above all heavens. But on His ascension aloft a storm came upon the disciples in the ship, i. e. the Church, and it became dark, the light, i. e. Jesus, having gone. As the end of the world draws nigh, error increases, iniquity abounds. Light again is love, according to John, He that hateth his brother is in darkness. (1 John 2:9) The waves and storms and winds then that agitate the ship, are the clamours of the evil speaking, and love waxing cold. Howbeit the wind, and storm, and waves, and darkness were not able to stop, and sink the vessel; For he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. (Matt. 10:22) As the number five has reference to the Law, the books of Moses being five, the number five and twenty, being made up of five pieces, has the same meaning. And this law was imperfect, before the Gospel came. Now the number of perfection is six, so therefore five is multiplied by six, which makes thirty: i. e. the law is fulfilled by the Gospel. To those then who fulfil the law Jesus comes treading on the waves, i. e. trampling under foot all the swellings of the world, all the loftiness of men: and yet such tribulations remain, that even they who believe on Jesus, fear lest they should be lost.

THEOPHYLACT. When either men or devils try to terrify us, let us hear Christ saying, It is I, be not afraid, i. e. I am ever near you, God unchangeable, immoveable; let not any false fears destroy your faith in Me. Observe too our Lord did not come when the danger was beginning, but when it was ending. He suffers

us to remain in the midst of dangers and tribulations, that we may be proved thereby, and flee for succour to Him Who is able to give us deliverance when we least expect it. When man's understanding can no longer help him, then the Divine deliverance comes. If we are willing also to receive Christ into the ship, i. e. to live in our hearts, we shall find ourselves immediately in the place, where we wish to be, i. e. heaven.

6:22–27

22. The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples were gone away alone;

23. (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks:)

24. When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.

25. And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?

26. Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

27. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xliii. 2) Our Lord, though He did not actually shew Himself to the multitude walking on the sea, yet gave them the opportunity of inferring what had taken place; The day following, the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto His disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with His disciples into the boat, but that His disciples were gone away alone. What was this but to suspect that He had walked across the sea, on His going away? For He could not have gone over in a ship, as there was only one there, that in which His disciples had entered; and He had not gone in with them.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xxv. 8) Knowledge of the miracle was conveyed to them indirectly. Other ships had come to the place where they had eaten bread; in these they went after Him; Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias, nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks. When

the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither His disciples, they also look shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xliii. 1) Yet after so great a miracle, they did not ask Him how He had passed over, or shew any concern about it: as appears from what follows; And when they had found Him on the other side of the sea, they said unto Him, Rabbi, when earnest Thou hither? Except we say that this when meant how. And observe their lightness of mind. After saying, This is that Prophet, and wishing to take Him by force to make Him king, when they find Him, nothing of the kind is thought of.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xxv. 8) So He Who had fled to the mountain, mixes and converses with the multitude. Only just now they would have kept Him, and made Him king. But after the sacrament of the miracle, He begins to discourse, and fills their souls with His word, whose bodies He had satisfied with bread.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xliv. 1) Kindness and lenity are not always expedient. To the indolent or insensible disciple the spur must be applied; and this the Son of God does. For when the multitude comes with soft speeches, Rabbi, when earnest Thou hither? He shews them that He did not desire the honour that cometh from man, by the severity of His answer, which both exposes the motive on which they acted, and rebukes it. Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xxv. 10) As if He said, Ye seek Me to satisfy the flesh, not the spirit.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xliv. 1) After the rebuke, however, He proceeds to teach them: Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life; meaning, Ye seek for temporal food, whereas I only fed your bodies, that ye might seek the more diligently for that food, which is not temporary, but contains eternal life.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xxv. 10) Under the figure of food He alludes to Himself. Ye seek Me, He saith, for the sake of something else; seek Me for My own sake.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xliv. 1.) But, inasmuch as some who wish to live in sloth, pervert this precept, Labour not, &c. it is well to notice what Paul says, Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Ephes. 4:28) And he himself too, when he resided with Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth, worked with his hand. By saying, Labour not for the meat which perisheth, our Lord does not mean to tell us to be idle; but to work, and give alms. This is that meat which perisheth not; to labour for the meat which perisheth, is to be

devoted to the interests of this life. Our Lord saw that the multitude had no thought of believing, and only wished to fill their bellies, without working; and this He justly called the meat which perisheth.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xxv. 10) As He told the woman of Samaria above, If thou knewest Who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water. (c. 4) So He says here, Which the Son of man shall give unto you.

HILARY. (viii. de Trin. c. 44) A seal throws out a perfect impression of the stamp, at the same time that it takes in that impression. This is not a perfect illustration of the Divine nativity: for sealing supposes matter, different kinds of matter, the impression of harder upon softer. Yet He who was God Only-Begotten, and the Son of man only by the Sacrament of our salvation, makes use of it to express the Father's fulness as stamped upon Himself. He wishes to shew the Jews He has the power of giving the eternal meat, because He contained in Himself the fulness of God.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xliv. 1) Or sealed, i. e. sent Him for this purpose, viz. to bring us food; or, sealed, was revealed the Gospel by means of His witness.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xxv. 10) How many there are who seek Jesus, only to gain some temporary benefit. One man has a matter of business, in which he wants the assistance of the clergy; another is oppressed by a more powerful neighbour, and flies to the Church for refuge: Jesus is scarcely ever sought for Jesus' sake.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

6:16 At Evening, Jesus' Disciples Went to the Sea

John Records the Disciples' Action.

Augustine: There is no inconsistency between Matthew and John. Matthew 1 has told us first how Jesus commanded his disciples to embark in the little ship and to go before him to the other side of the lake until he sent the multitudes away, and then he informs us that after the multitudes were sent away [Jesus] went up into a mountain alone to pray. John mentions first that he departed to a mountain alone and then proceeds to say, "And when it became late, his disciples came down to the sea; and when they had entered into a ship, etc." For who will not perceive that in recapitulating the facts, John has spoken of something as actually done at a later point by the disciples that Jesus had already charged them to do before his own departure to the mountain? Harmony of the Gospels 2.47.100.2

Two Different Accounts?

Chrysostom: This miracle seems to me to be a different one from the one given in Matthew, 3 and that it is different is clear for many reasons since he often repeats the same miracle in order to impress it on people's minds and to receive them with great faith.... There they do not receive him into the ship immediately, and here they do. Also, there the storm lasts for some time, whereas here as soon as he speaks, there is a calm. Homilies on the Gospel of John 43.1.4

Jesus Diffuses Speculation of Kingship.

Cyril of Alexandria: In order, then, that he might seem to have sailed away and thus diffuse the intensity of those who were looking for him, he orders the disciples to leave before him; but he stays, providing the opportunity for the next miracle. For his primary concern was to use every occasion to confirm the mind of the apostles in their faith toward him.... And so, when evening came and enough time had passed so that those who were seeking him gave up, the choir of holy disciples goes down to the sea and began to sail away immediately, obeying their God and teacher in everything without delay. Commentary on the Gospel of John 3.4.5

6:17–18 Jesus Was Not with Them

The Danger of Being Without Jesus in a Storm.

Cyril of Alexandria: The circumstances of their journey drive the disciples to a more intense search for the Savior. For the deep darkness of the night troubles them, hovering like smoke on the raging waves and taking away any ability for navigation. The fierce winds, riding on the waves with a rushing sound that raises the billows high above their heads, had to trouble them more than a little bit. Yes, and through all of this, John records, "Jesus was not yet with them." This was the real danger, and Christ's absence from these voyagers was making their fear grow more and more.

Those who are not with Jesus are in a fierce tempest of a storm. They are cut off from him or at least seem to be absent from him because they have departed from his holy laws. Because of their sin they are separated from the one who is able to save. If then it is overwhelming to be in such spiritual darkness, if it is oppressive to be swamped by the bitter sea of pleasures, let us then receive Jesus. For this is what will deliver us from dangers and from death in sin. Commentary on the Gospel of John 3.4.6

The Church in the Storm.

Augustine: He fled alone to the mountain—the first begotten from the dead—because he has ascended above all the heavens and is interceding for us. 7 ... But while he was above what were the disciples enduring in the ship below? For that ship prefigured the church while he is on high....

While they were sailing to [Capernaum], John tells us what happened to them. It became dark and Jesus had not come to them. It was right that John said it was dark, because the light [Jesus] had not yet come to them. As the end of the world draws near, errors increase, terrors multiply, iniquity abounds and infidelity escalates. Light, again, is love according to John. Whoever hates his brother is in darkness. 8 ... The waves and storms and winds then that agitate the ship, are the clamors of hurtful speech and love waxing cold.... Nevertheless the wind, and storm, and waves, and darkness were not able to stop and sink the vessel. For the one who endures to the end shall be saved....

And how does Jesus come to the disciples? He comes walking upon the waves, keeping all the swellings of the world under his feet, pressing down all of humanity's pride. And so it continues, so long as time endures, so long as the ages roll. Tribulations increase, all these swell and mount up: Jesus passes on treading upon the waves. And yet, so great are the tribulations that even those who have trusted in Jesus and who strive to persevere to the end greatly fear lest they fail.... But they open the gospel, they open the Scriptures and find all these things there foretold; that this is the Lord's doing. He tramples down the heights of the world that he may be glorified by the humble. Tractates on the Gospel of John 25.4–7.9

In the Storm of This Life, We Need Prayer.

Isaiah of Scete: Like a pilot steering a boat through the waves, one should hold to the course, guided by grace. Keeping his attention fixed within himself, he should commune with God in stillness, guarding his thoughts from distraction and his intellect from curiosity.

In storms and squalls we need a pilot, and in this present life we need prayer, for we are susceptible to the provocations of our thoughts, both good and bad. If our thought is full of devotion and love of God, it rules over the passions. On Guarding the Intellect 23–24.10

6:19–20 Do Not Be Afraid

Divine Help Is Ours.

Cyril of Alexandria: Christ does not appear to those in the boat immediately after they set sail or at the onset of danger but only when they are far away from the shore. For the grace of our Savior does not come to us when our tribulations begin but when our fear is at its height and the danger shows itself to be great—when we are found, so to say, in the midst of the waves of affliction. Then, Christ appears unexpectedly and removes our fear and frees us from all danger. By his ineffable power he changes horror into joy, and as it were, calms the storm.... When Christ appears and looks on us, we shall effortlessly succeed even against our hope. And we who are in danger because of our distance from Christ shall no longer have to labor to accomplish what is helpful for us when he is present. Christ is our deliverance from all danger and the accomplishment of achievements beyond hope to those who receive him. Commentary on the Gospel of John 3.4.11